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SYSTEM AND CLIQUE

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President Lowell has observed that "human progress is like beating to windward, a tack to starboard and then a tack to port, for mankind, unable to discern absolute truth in shaping its course, moves forward by over-accentuating one principle at a time." Mankind has been worse than unable to discern; it has been habitually under the delusion of having found absolute truth and has exalted the principle temporarily in need of accentuation into a universal touchstone. Some survival of a sect so originating is assured by the adherence of those who temperamentally tend to emphasize its cardinal doctrine after the majority has moved off on the other tack.

The habit of faith in one or another system that explained and classified everything was so ingrained that when intellectual revolt set in Induction could not pause with what was verifiable, though limited, but itself became a system-builder. The *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* protested against *ex pede Herculem*, as setting a problem only for dullards, suggesting that the motto be: "From the little toe-nail apprehend Hercules and all his family." At times, when one is in the mood of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes, it seems that the Autocrat had phrased not playfully, but literally, the spirit of all comprehensive philosophers.

The epigram characterizing Comte's *Positive Philosophy* as Catholicism minus Christianity has survived because of its modicum of justice. Mr. John Morley not unfairly concludes that, "after performing a great and real service to truth, Comte almost sacrificed his claims to gratitude by the invention of a system that, as such, and independently of detached suggestions, is markedly retrograde."

Positivism was conceived shortly after the Great Awakening of 1789 and the evolutionary philosophy of Herbert Spencer, the

product of a half-century later, is naturally less papally authoritative, less fancifully constructive. In its degree, however, it carries much the same assumption of universal *eureka* and it is accordingly lapsing into the same historical limbo.

The recent celebration of the Darwinian Centennial has called forth not a little disparaging contrast between Spencer's "gossamer spinnings" in psychology, ethics, and politics, and the lasting benefit rendered by the author of *The Origin of Species*. Darwin is recognized as the commanding figure of his group of English scientists because, along with a certain amount of demonstrated truth, advanced by him in perfect humility of spirit, he pointed the way for building scientific law on the rock, and not the sand.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of system-making of recent years—not indeed by scientific but rather by bedlamistic methods—is Christian Science. Here, the germinal toe-nail of Hercules was the therapeutic potency of suggestion addressed to subconsciousness. This phenomenon, the foundation of hypnotism, has been known and practiced, sporadically in Europe and systematically in Asia, for centuries. Doubtless the solidification and growth of the Christian Science movement were promoted by the uncompromising incredulity of the normal-minded world that would not hunt for the needle of truth in a haystack of unthinkable dogmatism, and pronounced even the alleged bodily healing a delusion no better than witchcraft. Latterly this attitude has been changing. A psychologist of the standing of Professor Münsterberg does not hesitate to treat nervous maladies and evil propensities by processes of mere thought. Glancing through a recent medical work on the *Treatment of Internal Diseases*, by a physician of the regular school, eminent as a practitioner and instructor, the present writer was impressed by the frequent insistence upon the incidental efficacy of mental suggestion in the use of drugs and mechanical devices. The "Emmanuel Movement," in the Episcopalian church, is significant of the same general trend. Meantime, in the very teeth of the possession of the thinking world by the spirit of inductive science, Christian Scientists have compassed a stupendous propa-

ganda of a superstition, the assumption of whose organic connection with its grain of verity reminds one of the infatuation immortalized by Charles Lamb, that, in order to enjoy roast pig, one must burn down a house.

Lamartine's greeting to his fellow thirty-nine "Immortals," "You place yourself, like truth, above systems," is coming more and more to indicate the average habit of mind. In the earlier days of our Republic toleration ranged as a cardinal virtue; and this was inevitable in a system-ridden age, when every man, although arrogating the inerrancy and completeness of his own system, recognized redeeming qualities in his brother's obsession and patronizingly would help him to make the most of them. Toleration is, indeed, not a virtue at all, merely a sweetened pharisaism; an attribute of transition and truce. Sir Henry Maine has said that "the movement of the progressive societies has been a movement from status to contract." A moral supplement of the same tendency is the movement from toleration to sympathetic assimilation.

An important illustration is the modification of *laissez-faire* democracy by the spirit of socialism. The ideal of socialism has been described as the "final suspension of that personal struggle for existence which has been waged, not only from the beginning of society, but, in one form or another, from the beginning of life." It would be impossible in one generation, or ten generations, to extinguish the instinct of self-assertion and conflict for supremacy which has been bred in the bone of hundreds of generations. Such socialistic experiments as have been attempted—the South Australian village-settlements, the Brook Farm community in Massachusetts—have tended to justify the a-priori criticism. They did not succeed because human nature was the same inside communal organizations as elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the influence of socialism as a corrective is one of the most serious factors in modern life. Such of its innovations as have gained foothold ameliorate the merciless extremes of competition without radically interfering with it. General laws for protection of public health, laws providing for the safety and reasonable comfort of laborers, laws regulating the

period and manner of work of women and children—these, and many other similar enactments, do not essentially affect individual enterprise and ambition. Probably there will always be a sufficient number of those temperamentally tending to accentuate the doctrines of socialism to preserve its sectarian identity. The practical assimilation of its tendencies is, however, typical of the general interchange of vital ideas, of the subsidence of systems, of the mongrelization of such systems as continue in any degree workable.

A reflection of M. Taine, applied to the field of politics, with slight modification would cover many other departments as well. This remark, originally uttered with an apology for its apparent triteness, has been repeated, with the apology, by many political students, because independently they have come to realize its actual profundity.

Jusqu'à présent, je n'en ai guère trouvé qu'un (principe politique), si simple qu'il semblera puéril et que j'ose à peine l'énoncer. . . . Il consiste tout entier dans cette remarque qu'une société humaine, surtout une société moderne, est une chose vaste et compliquée.

Systems naturally bred sects and cults for their propagation. Loyalty to comprehensive philosophies, and to institutions assumed to be sanctioned by them, lent a sacred, or semi-sacred, character to all manner of fraternities and cliques founded under ecclesiastical, or royal, or aristocratic patronage. Popular sentiment in continental Europe still betrays the influence of sacrosanct officialism. The present emperor of Germany, upon his accession to the throne, made some observations touching the divine right of kings, which probably he would not now repeat and which were received on this side of the Atlantic as if they had been strains of *opéra bouffe*. The average American may be surprised to hear a political significance attached to Alphonse Daudet's novel, *Les rois en exil*, it having even been compared with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, because its satire aided in laughing the lingering belief in "divine right" away.

None the less, Americans have their own very potential *machina* of occult authority. Bagehot has descanted upon the conservative utility of the king, the court, and the aristocracy,

because of their appeal to popular imagination and their fostering of loyalty to the institution which they symbolize. He summarizes:

Royalty is a government in which the attention of the nation is concentrated on one person doing interesting actions; a republic is a government in which that attention is divided between many who are all doing uninteresting actions. Accordingly, so long as the human heart is strong and the human reason weak, royalty will be strong because it appeals to diffuse feeling and republics weak because they appeal to the understanding.

This author failed to realize the cohesive power of mere thoughts idealized into shibboleths. As matter of fact, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have served as a sufficient substitute for what Bagehot terms the "dignified parts of government." In another place the present writer has remarked that "'the glittering generalities' of 1776, treasured in emotion and fancy for a century, had evolved an abstract spirit of allegiance which carried our Republic safely through the crisis of the Electoral Commission of 1876."¹

The reverential spirit toward pure ideas, among Americans, has served fully as much as deference to historical institutions and exalted personages, among Europeans, to attach adventitious importance to mere organization. If a society or clique really has a reason for being, sentiment magnifies its actual importance, especially if it maintains rites and ceremonials of mysterious solemnity. In America, as in Europe, veneration for anything that is old lends a social attractiveness to a guild that has managed to endure and preserve its form and traditions for a century.

It follows that, while gropings after comprehensive philosophies are coming to rank with the search for the philosopher's stone, the tendency to excessive human organization does not abate. It is, indeed, on the increase in this democratic republic where, as in Europe, the inherited instinct for system-building seems to have passed into and intensified the spirit of mere clique.²

¹"The Consent of the Governed," *American Law Review*, 161 (March-April, 1906), 40.

²It is not patriotic, but merely chauvinistic and absurdly inconsistent as well, in one belonging to an American guild that inherently stands for little or

At a public dinner in one of our large cities the governor of the state came in late, having spent the afternoon and early evening reviewing militia regiments. In beginning his address he said that he was glad he had finished his arduous duties as commander-in-chief of the state army and that now he proposed to have a good time. The governor was in the conventional black and white of evening clothes, but he was still attended by his military secretary, imposing and gorgeous as General Tufto, the breast of his uniform covered with medals and decorations. While there is less display of wampum outside the vocation, or avocation, of arms, it is not very uncommon to see grouped on the same civilian lapel the triple alliance of the Sons of the American Revolution, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, and the Society of Christian Endeavor. A person who does not wear at least one badge is a rarity.

It is not intended generally to cavil at these and other associations. Some of them exist for very definite objects and many of them incidentally fulfil laudable charitable ends. It would, for example, itself be a gross manifestation of the spirit of clique for a scholarly person, from whose watch-chain depends the key of Phi Beta Kappa, to sneer at an artisan for wearing the pin of his labor union. In both cases the insignia denote personally vital things.

Of course mankind has the right to form societies for any purposes not unlawful, and, in one sense, it may seem an impertinence to comment upon the manner in which the privilege is exercised. The tendency is, however, legitimately open to criticism because of the aggravation of it. Taking ourselves, by and large, we are a be-badged, be-ribboned generation, always seeking for a sign of identification of the individual with a

nothing, to condemn his neighbor for treating courteously the tender of membership in a European order that stands for as much, or more. Because of the greater age and traditional authority of the European organization its star or cross is probably bestowed with discrimination and betokens that the recipient has accomplished something worthy of public recognition. Even if favoritism be indulged at home, foreigners will not often be decorated save for important service or achievement. An American so honored, therefore, receives something besides "a ribbon to stick in his coat."

corporate body. In all ranks of humanity there is a struggle among the units of a class for entrance into any circle that has set up a standard of competitive eligibility; a craving for the prestige of membership in any guild, no matter what its test of exclusiveness.

With some persons the aspiration does not extend beyond the mere fact of "arrival" and childish delight in the toy of the society's badge. Not less significant because of their folly, statutes have been passed in some states making it a misdemeanor for individuals not members of certain secret orders to wear their badges. One of these laws extended the privilege of badge-wearing to the wives and daughters of members, so that a young woman who wore a member's badge just before, instead of just after, she married him, would be guilty of a crime. It was sought to justify this provision on the ground that it would prevent fraud through applications for charity by pretenders. The court of the state, however, could not find in that argument sufficient substance to hold the act constitutional, evidently taking the view that its real purpose was to dignify the societies and their gewgaws.

With the majority of aspirants to secret and other orders the motive is not merely superficial, but there is joined to social, or other, ambition a sense of the importance of organization. The imputation of adventitious authority to organization grows and grows, and, like a worm i' the bud, it preys upon natural relations. Equality and fraternity are discredited; entirely ordinary persons are furnished a pretext for snobbishness. Very many American voluntary associations certainly have no reason for being which is visible to the naked eye of the outside world and their principal characteristic is abuses of cliquish intrigue.

It is claimed that the series of American "patriotic" societies foster the feeling, *noblesse oblige*. To a slight extent this may be true, but the real stem of crystallization is exaggerated ego. None of us could avoid having a grandfather and it confers no essential distinction that one's progenitor rendered public service, albeit humble. The various cults of "sons" and "daughters" are at root social clubs with membership so large and heterogeneous

that they display the vices of arbitrary clique without the virtues of real aristocracy.

In May, 1865, the question being raised at its annual meeting whether the American Anti-Slavery Society should dissolve, William Lloyd Garrison offered a resolution,

WHEREAS, It is not for Abolitionists to affect exclusiveness or to seek isolation from the great mass of the people, when the reasons which compelled them to take such position no longer exist; therefore,

Resolved, That we close the operations and the existence of this society with the present anniversary.

He persisted in pressing his motion against the opposition of Wendell Phillips and others and, although it was lost and the society continued a nominal existence for five years longer, declined re-election as president and withdrew from membership. In the story of Garrison's life by his children, it is said: "Doubtless he would have been willing to continue in that position until the last state had ratified the Constitutional Amendment, if he had believed that the society would then dissolve." But, in addition to the fact that control had passed to those with whom he was no longer in sympathy, he perceived "that the force of habit was strong with many of the old friends of the cause, to whom the annual meetings and festivals and conventions had been meat and drink for many years, and who, reluctant to break up old and delightful associations, inclined a willing ear to the arguments that the society was never more needed than now."

The Anti-Slavery Society might very readily have been taken as the basis of a hereditary guild; much more so, indeed, than the latest of similar organizations recently formed and consisting of descendants of war governors, and other persons, who served the federal government during the Civil War in other than military capacities. It would seem that the *simulacra* of traditional patriotism, as an excuse for ancestor-worship and social cultism, must now have been exhausted.

A society for the accomplishment of some definite end is ever to be respected by those who respect other people's sincerity although they may disagree with other people's opinions. If a club be formed for social purposes, let it honestly proclaim its

test of membership and not masquerade as a promoter of patriotism or a conserver of historical traditions. The example of Garrison may well be accepted by consistent democrats for the disbanding of any association that has fulfilled its destiny.

Clique based upon organization of things of the mind is apt to be very inveterate and quite subversive of true ideals. With the leaders, self-reliance and faith in thought tend to breed a provincialism which discourages the verification of premises by searching Thought's widening horizon. Arrogant insularity was, of course, more common in the ages of "system" but it crops out now under mere pride of sect. The provincialism of any guild of learning in its degree is comparable to that of a brilliant, self-satisfied metropolis—to the proverbial provincialism of Paris.

With the rank and file, who do not think but are merely loyal, there grows up as youth recedes an idolatry of one's own intellectual *penates* that has much the same blind tenacity formerly exerted by denominational religious affiliations.

The prejudices of a great man are entitled to no more regard than those of an ordinary man, although adoration of his genius often abets him in insisting that his crotchets shall be taken as sacred things. Adventitious features that sprout in the rich soil of a great institution often call for the plow and the hoe, not the watering of sentimental tears. Pure sentiment for the adventitious—the cherishing of mere association—is human and lovable. Average mankind, however, unfortunately does not separate the sentimental from the essential, but cherishes fortuitous elements as vital.

Cults so originating furnish opportunity for pitiable abuses. Who has not known—to put a gross case—American graduates who become college parasites? They never reflect distinction back on alma mater through original aspiration or accomplishment, but whenever public occasion offers they may be counted upon to shine in alma mater's glory, if necessary through bribery of newspaper reporters. They suck social prominence and even business opportunity from their alumni association.

It amounts to a reproach for a person in middle life to be

primarily known as a "Harvard man," or a "Yale man," or a "Columbia man." Similarly as of one of mature years, who is principally prominent through membership in a college fraternity, there is suggested an arrest of development at the sophomoric stage. He serves his party best who serves his country best; and Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft, James Russell Lowell and Edmund Clarence Stedman have demonstrated that he most illustriously honors alma mater who, in the world of public service or of letters, most practically promotes the political benefit of humanity, or most successfully forwards the ideals of an unsectarian culture.

The authorities of our universities have recognized the stunting tendency of clique by guarding against excessive inbreeding in the selection of professors, by establishing the feature of sabbatical years, and by co-operating in the international exchange of professorships. It is a healthful sign that fresh-air treatment is being applied to the mildew of corporate self-satisfaction. There is, however, a serious additional duty to perform in overcoming the clannish prejudices of alumni and the insular complacency of undergraduates. In an article on "Competition in College," in the *Atlantic Monthly* for June, 1909, President Lowell cogently pleaded for the stimulation of intellectual competition among students in the academic departments of universities. An important step in that direction would be to frown out the assumption that the prestige of an institution—no matter how great—is sufficient imputably as a mental equipment or a social talisman. Prestige, itself, is a force of constantly varying voltage; it must ever increase as the alternative to gradual extinction.

The self-sufficiency of Paris is epitomized in towns, especially suburban towns, and uniformly it tends to develop the dwarfing spirit of clique. The typical suburb exhibits a substratum of old families with some wealth, an increasing number of newcomers with more wealth, a limited professional class, a sprinkling of gifted persons and men of celebrity, and, welded out of these elements, an independent community of ever-growing capacity to monopolize the energy of its members. The social

exclusiveness of the larger world is miniaturized in the patronesses of charities and public entertainments. Literary, scientific, and musical clubs are formed; and the temptation of provincial personal distinction weans from devotion to "the things that are more excellent."

A man, who was successful but inconspicuous in business in a great city and resided in one of its suburbs, naïvely gave as his reason for electing the suburb, and not the city, as his habitat, in signing a summer-hotel register, that he preferred to name a place where he was somebody, rather than one where he was nobody. This attitude is but another phase of individual aspiration based upon aggravated sense of the importance of mere organization, which has already been considered. Even among persons of superior mental type, social identification with the microcosm must to a material degree dispose toward contentment with its close-drawn spiritual horizon.

Provincialism may, indeed, be more radically pervasive in the large town, or the extensive suburb, than in the small remote settlement. Village life in all its phases is so petty and sordid that minds of the better order are impelled to seek refuge in the great world of books and to keep sympathetically in touch with the theater of affairs through newspapers and periodicals. The writer is acquainted with a country lawyer, residing more than two hundred miles from the city of New York, who is competent to act as cicerone and peripatetic catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is believed that this example is not exceptional but typical of the reaching-out from crass aridity toward cosmopolitanism.

On the other hand, the average suburb, in addition to a bustling round of social functions, offers many circlets of intellectual and aesthetic aim, and, as a resultant of all its activities, a public opinion and a set of standards of its own. The contagion of narrow sentiment, the sirens of personal blandishment may, of course, be withstood. There are persons who live a suburban life in the proper sense of the term, that is, while their physical existence and their bodily eye are of the suburb, their tastes and aspirations, as well as their business enterprise, are of

the city. Suburbanites of long standing, however, who have not imbibed the criteria of amateurism are shining examples of self-watchfulness and of firmness.

The scope of this paper could scarcely be extended to include racial castes, but for extreme illustration a brief reference may be made to the remarkable article in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April, 1908, by Dr. Edwin J. Kuh, on "The Social Disability of the Jew." He declares that "a heavy burden of responsibility for the intolerance against the Jews rests on the Jew himself," because of the rigid preservation of racial identity, tradition, and self-consciousness. Dr. Kuh suggests "judicious intermarriage" as the principal means of abrogating social barriers. The separatism of the Jews, which we join Dr. Kuh in hoping will be voluntarily abandoned, signally exemplifies the anachronism of clique in the modern world. The spirit of clique is opposed to that spontaneous individualism which is the very essence of democracy and to cosmopolitanism, which is merely unsectarian democracy.